

Some Observations on Christian Burial Practices at Kellis

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Introduction

In 1997 I was invited by Anthony Mills to publish the archaeology of the Kellis 2 cemetery as an adjunct to my work on early Christianity in Egypt. Since that time further Christian burials have been discovered at Kellis other than in this cemetery. The primary aim of this paper is to publish preliminary observations on the burial practices adopted by the Christian community at Kellis in light of what is known of such practices in Egypt. The graves in Kellis 2 are being excavated by archaeologists under the direction of Eldon Molto, who co-ordinates the work of the physical anthropologists. Molto and his team are conducting a range of analyses on the skeletal remains that have added a new dimension to our knowledge of the community. Molto's analyses include radiocarbon tests of twelve samples in an effort to determine the date of the interments. The interpretation of the results of those analyses presents a broad time-frame that is seemingly at variance with the data from the settlement. This paper, therefore, presents an ideal opportunity to consider this dichotomy and how it might be addressed by archaeologists and physical anthropologists alike.

Kellis 2 Cemetery

The Kellis 2 cemetery (31/420-C5-2) is located to the north-east of the settlement (Birrell 1999, 38–41). Systematic excavations of the burials commenced in 1992 (Birrell 1999, 38) and to date 450 graves have been excavated (Stewart *et al.* this volume). Molto (2002, 241) has estimated the number of graves in the cemetery to be between 3,000 and 4,000, if the density of the burials in

the cemetery as a whole is reflected by the area excavated so far (Molto 2002, Figures 2 and 4). All graves are aligned on an east-west axis with minor deviations that may reflect winter or summer burials.¹ The graves are simple rectangular pits cut into the bedrock to an average depth of 1.3 m; the other dimensions are variable but for adults the average graves are *circa* 1.9 m long by 65 cm wide.² Four distinct types of grave are recorded. In the most elaborate the upper part of the pit, 35 cm above the floor, was widened and lined with mud bricks that terminated in a subsurface vault; the grave was then covered with a mud-brick mastaba superstructure. The second type is a rectangular pit with sloping sides, narrowing towards the bottom. The rubble fill, thrown directly onto the body, was covered with a false mud-brick floor and finished with a mastaba. A variation on this type omits the false floor and the fill extends into the superstructure. Many of the mastabas have traces of gypsum plaster coating. All of the superstructures have suffered the effects of erosion and it is not possible to determine their original height. The fourth type is the simple pit with the fill above the body covered by a low earth mound that was gypsum coated.

A number of mud-brick tomb enclosures have been identified; two, Enclosures 1 and 2 located two metres apart, have been excavated (Birrell 1999, 38–40, Figure 3). The enclosures are badly eroded and little survives of their superstructures. The external dimensions of Enclosure 1 are 3.4 metres square, the walls are preserved to a height of three courses; the exterior and interior walls and the floor were gypsum coated. The doorway was not located. The enclosure contained four burials: three adults and one young child. The most southerly of the graves (1D) is of

¹ This interpretation was suggested by M. Birrell (personal communication 1994). Jeffreys and Strouhal (1980, 34) observed the same phenomenon in the Christian cemetery at the site of the Sacred Animal Necropolis in North Saqqara. Based upon the east-west azimuthal orientation of the graves, they estimated that 50.9% of the interments took place in winter, 23.6% in each of spring and autumn and 1.5% in summer.

² The following information is taken from various field notebooks and personal observation.

the first type; the mastaba was preserved to a height of 60 cm above the floor and retained some of its gypsum coating. No surviving superstructure is recorded for the remaining adult graves. Enclosure 2 is *circa* 4 metres square and was more elaborate in design with two columns on its north-western corner and a third on the north wall towards the north-eastern corner. The door opened to the east. The walls are badly eroded and preserve only two courses of mud bricks. Although no remains of gypsum plaster were detected, it may be assumed that it too was coated in white. It cannot be determined whether or not this or the neighbouring structure was roofed. Enclosure 2 contained six graves but only three were excavated. Graves 3 and 5 were intrusive shallow pits dug for infants and had no superstructures. Grave 8 was badly eroded with the mastaba preserved to a height of 16 cm; it is of the same type as grave 1D. The grave was undisturbed and contained the body of a young woman; there were no accompanying grave goods. The plan indicates that the three remaining unexcavated graves had mastaba superstructures. These enclosures may well have been family tombs.

Burial practice throughout the cemetery, as illustrated by the excavated graves, was uniform. The bodies were placed directly onto the floor of the pit with the head on the west and with one exception they were single interments.³ The corpse was wrapped in a linen shroud that was secured with woven linen ties wound in a criss-cross or lateral fashion and placed directly into the pit in a supine position; the hands were to the sides or over the pelvic region (Birrell 1999, 41). In some instances, large broken pots had been placed above the body (Birrell 1999, 41, Plate 10). The ceramic vessels included reused pigeon pots, presumably collected from a *columbarium* located near the cemetery, and large decorated vessels of the type found in the fourth-century houses in Area A, and elsewhere in the settlement (Birrell 1999, 40–1, Plate 10; Patten 1999, 88, Figure 1:10; Hope this volume) other sherds found in the fill include those from decorated vessels that are typical of the fourth-century ceramics from the settlement (Patten 1999, Figure 1:2). Although many of the graves have been disturbed, it can be determined from those still intact that burial goods were minimal: one string of beads, a reused glass vessel (Birrell 1999, 41; Marchini 1999, 81–2), the occasional ceramic bowl with red painted ticks on the rim (Patten 1999, 83, Figure 1:2) and sprays of rosemary and myrtle (U. Thanheiser personal communication, 1998). Infant burials were dispersed amongst those of the adult population; they were placed in shallow pits again cut on an east-west orientation, heads on the west. Such burial practices equate with the Christian tradition and, consequently, those interred have been identified as belonging to the Christian community at Kellis.

Twelve samples taken by Molto from eleven of the bodies exhumed have been subjected to radiocarbon dating and initial results, based upon the 2-sigma calibration, although inconclusive, indicate that the cemetery could have been in use from the end of the Ptolemaic Period until around 600 CE (Stewart *et al.* this volume). The early date is impossible if those interred were Christian. Molto and his team acknowledge that such a broad time span is unlikely and propose that the solution may be to narrow the margins by taking the latest end of the early date and the early end of the latest date, which gives a date range of between 220–380 CE. This, however, they regard as methodologically unsound and equally improbable and suggest that the date range for the use of the cemetery lies somewhere between those extremes (Stewart *et al.* this volume). Archaeological evidence from the settlement indicates that Kellis had a sizeable Christian community by the first half of the fourth century; this is attested by three churches at the site, two of which date to that time (Bowen 2002, 84; this volume). The earliest documentary attestation of a Christian from the village, however, is dated 319 (*PUG* 20 and *P. Med. inv.* 68.82; Wagner 1987 327–8). Papyrological, numismatic and ceramic evidence indicate that Kellis was abandoned towards the close of the fourth century (Hope 1999, 54–7). If the cemetery is indeed Christian, and if Kellis was abandoned at the end of the fourth century, the interpretation of the radiocarbon dates and archaeological data are at variance. If, however, the narrow range, considered to be improbable by the physical anthropologists, can be accepted, it would render the two sets of data more compatible, although a date of 220 for the first burials in the cemetery is problematic in light of what is known of the nature of Christianity at that period. With this in mind, an investigation of what is understood of early Christian burial practices in Egypt and Kellis and a discussion of the abandonment of the village is warranted before proceeding with further evidence for Christian interment at Kellis.

Early Christian Burial Practices in Egypt

The Problem of Identity

First, it should be established, as far as possible, that the cemetery belonged to and was used by Christians. This necessitates a brief statement of the nature of early Christianity together with evidence for comparable, contemporary burial practices. Christians, identifying as such, are undetectable in the archaeological record until at least the mid-third century. As there was no prohibition on Christians and pagans being buried within the same tombs or cemeteries (Johnson 1999, 42), the practice was continued by some Christians beyond the fourth century (Hauser 1932, 44–50; Thomas 2000, 34; Venit 2002, 181–

³ The exception is Grave 92 that contained the bodies of two infants (Bodies 95 and 96).

6). Many who adopted the new religion held an amalgam of beliefs and practices. In Egypt, the iconography of the old religion was adapted by the new. For example, Isis and Horus became the Mother and Child, whilst the *ankh*, the pharaonic symbol for life, was modified and became the Christian *crux ansata*.

Regardless of whether or not the church imposed a dogma, some Christians continued to venerate the old gods along with the new, and to continue the age-old practice of mummification and pagan burial rites. Evidence for the continued practice of mummification and the employment of Christians as necropolis workers during the late third century is contained in a letter found amongst those in the dossier of the necrotaphs from Kysis, modern Dush in Kharga Oasis. It concerns the transportation of the mummified remains of a Christian woman, Politike whose body was entrusted to the care of Christian necrotaphs, on the instructions of Psenosiris to his fellow presbyter Apollon (Deissmann 1902, 10–12). Further evidence for the continuation of the practice by some Christians comes in the form of a mummy labels; one undated example bears the name Psentheos, son of Apollonius, son of Patses; the patronym is followed by the Christian *chi-rho* monogram (Scott-Moncrieff 1913, 102–3). The mummified bodies of three women, covered with painted shrouds, were found by Gayet at Antinoopolis; the shrouds are now dated to the early fourth century (Aubert 2000, 147–8; Walker 2000, 36).⁴ Each woman is shown in her finery holding a *crux ansata* to her breast with her left hand and her right hand raised in what might be termed a gesture of prayer (Doxiadis 1995, 118, 120, 161). The *crux ansata* is well attested within a Christian funerary context and is the most prominent symbol depicted on the wall paintings in the necropolis at Bagawat (Fakhry 1951). The use of the symbol on the Antinoopolis shrouds indicates that the women presented as Christian in death (Scott-Moncrieff 1913, 107–9; Dunand 1998, 164), although some authorities remain reluctant to accept this identification (Aubert 2000, 147–8).

As no separate Christian cemetery has been found at Dush and the archive suggests that the necrotaphs served the pagan community, it could be assumed that Politike was buried in a tomb alongside members of the pagan population. The records from Gayet's excavations at Antinoopolis indicate that the bodies of the three women were interred in simple pits in Necropolis E (Doxiadis 1995, 151) that included pagan and Christian burial.⁵

Separate Cemeteries; Separate Customs

At some undetermined point in time Christians made a conscious effort to adopt a distinctive mode of burial from that of their pagan contemporaries. The earliest public Christian cemetery is St Callixtus' Catacomb in Rome, commissioned by Pope Zephyrinus in the early third century (Toynbee 1971, 236).⁶ Tertullian (*ad scapulam* 3) implies a separate cemetery for Christians at the important see of Carthage by 203; the text, however, is ambiguous and should be treated with caution. In Alexandria, an exclusively Christian hypogeum in the Hadra necropolis was excavated by Breccia in 1908 (Venit 2002, 181). Frog lamps found there could date it as early as the third century; however as these lamps were manufactured in Egypt during the third and fourth centuries and may have continued into the fifth century (Bailey 1988, 217), they do not confirm an early date for the cemetery. Separate cemeteries for Christians, therefore, should not be expected prior to the third century.

The *Didascalia Apostolorum*, composed in Greek during the third century in Syria and translated into Syriac and Latin (Cross and Livingstone 1974, 401), provides information on what Davies (1999, 199)⁷ terms 'ordinary' early Christian burial practices: the body was washed, anointed and sometimes embalmed; it was then carried to the grave where it was buried with a Eucharist. The grave was aligned on an east-west axis and the body placed directly onto the floor of the pit, face upward, with the feet to the east in order to rise facing the Son of Man on the day of resurrection (Davies 1999, 199). Such practices were not confined to Syria but spread throughout the Christian world. Whilst some regarded modest graves as exemplary, they were not mandatory and wealthy Christians were also buried in expensive mausolea. These are attested in Egypt from the fourth century and are best exemplified by the tombs at Bagawat in Kharga Oasis and at Oxyrhynchus (below). Even within these expensive tombs, however, the bodies were simply shrouded and placed in the traditional east-west position with few, if any grave goods (Lythgoe 1908, 205–6; Petrie 1925, 16–9).

In the early fourth century it was usual for Christians to follow the traditional custom found throughout the ancient world of locating cemeteries outside of the town or city. Unlike pagans, Christians regarded the body as 'sleeping' or lying in the grave to await the day of resurrection and, as such, the person interred was considered to be a part of the world of the living. As a consequence of this doctrine,

⁴ The shrouds were previously dated by B. Borg, (Problems in the Dating of Mummy Portraits, in E. Doxiadis, *The Mysterious Fayum Portraits*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1995, 232–3) to the first half of the third century. Borg has now accepted the later date (S. Walker personal communication, 2000).

⁵ Gayet's publications are not available in Australia.

⁶ Toynbee (1971, 236) notes that the information is recorded in an early third-century Greek text, the *Elenchos*.

⁷ The *Didascalia Apostolorum* is not readily available and consequently the comments are based upon those provided by Davies.

towards the end of the fourth century in Rome, burial grounds were established within the city walls, often in association with martyria and churches (Davies 1999, 193). The practice was followed in other regions within the Empire (Brown 1981). Whilst many graves outside churches continued the east-west alignment, by the sixth century this attention to orientation was often abandoned.⁸

Christian Cemeteries in Dakhleh, Kharga and the Nile Valley

The funerary practices adopted by the Christian community in Kellis 2 and other places of interment associated with the village (below) conform to what Davies terms 'ordinary' burials. Parallels are attested elsewhere in Dakhleh, in Kharga Oasis and in the Nile Valley. This paper does not allow for an exhaustive catalogue of such; a single example from each of the above areas will suffice. In the west of Dakhleh, a cemetery (33/390-I7-2) of around 40–45 pit graves, aligned on an east-west axis with deviations, lies adjacent to a small settlement (33/390-I7-1); the bodies found within the excavated graves were buried in the standard Christian position and contained no burial goods (Mills 1979, 182). Two small rock-cut dwellings (33/390-I6-1), presumably used by Christian ascetics, are located in the sandstone hills to the north-west within sight of the village and cemetery (Mills 1979, 182) and may have been associated with it. The settlement has been dated tentatively to the fourth–fifth centuries CE on ceramic evidence (Hope 1980, 299–300).

The elaborate mausolea in the necropolis of Bagawat, Kharga Oasis, are predominantly Christian. Those tombs that were excavated fully contained both single and multiple burials, the bodies were not mummified but wrapped and placed on the floor with the head on the west (Lythgoe 1908, 205–6; Hauser 1932, 50). There is a single exception: a tomb that contained 13 bodies, including four babies. The five earlier burials were in pit graves beneath the floor; above these were three reused wooden coffins containing four bodies. The remaining bodies were placed on the floor, one beneath a coffin and the other three laid on top of two of the coffins (Hauser 1932). All bodies, including those in coffins, were placed with their heads to the west and the earlier interments were buried in a typically Christian fashion. Grave goods were minimal and included none of the traditional pharaonic items; the inclusion of infants is atypical of pagan practices and it is not unreasonable to assume that many, if not all of the occupants were Christian. Hauser (1932, 49–50) identifies the bodies as pagan because of the reuse of pharaonic-style coffins, the presence of a Greek figurine and a gilded

bronze coin of Nero that had been incorporated into a pendant. Hauser (1932, 50) argues that no Christian would be buried with pharaonic iconography or wear a coin depicting the archenemy of Christianity. The reuse by Christians of sections from pagan coffins, however, is attested in the cemetery at Saqqara (below) (Martin 1974, 21); moreover, Christians had no compunction about being buried in pagan tombs painted with traditional funerary motifs (see below), so why not in reused coffins? Hellenistic iconography is not out of place within a Christian context; a bronze Greek-style figurine and a ring with an engraving of a *menaid* were found in the Large East Church at Kellis (Bowen 2002, 75, Plates 6 and 7). The coin incorporated into the pendant was struck at least 225 years earlier and one wonders whether the emperor depicted was of relevance to the wearer. There is every possibility that the pendant was an heirloom. Coins of Diocletian, an even greater enemy of Christians than Nero, were found in both the Large and Small East Churches at Kellis (Bowen 2002, 81–2; this volume).

In 1908 about one hundred simple pit graves that form part of a larger pit-grave cemetery located on the slopes of the Bagawat necropolis, were excavated (Lythgoe 1908, 203–8). The graves are aligned on an east-west axis and had low mud-brick superstructures,⁹ a headstone and footstone; the former was engraved with the name of the interred (Lythgoe 1908, 207; Wagner 1991, 327–8). Lythgoe (1908, 207) describes the superstructures as being either a mud-brick mastaba above a fill of rubble and gravel, and an oval mound of rubble and gravel with a mud-plaster coating. They resemble, therefore, two of the superstructure types in Kellis 2. From the photograph published in 1908, these pit graves also show some deviation in alignment (Lythgoe 1908, 208, Figure 7). The bodies were wrapped in burial shrouds secured variously with bands. Most were devoid of grave goods although some bodies had hairpins and small items of personal adornment. They were laid with the head on the west, hands to the sides or over the pelvic region. Several of the graves can be dated to the fourth century on the evidence of coins of Constantine I and Constantius II found with the bodies (Hauser 1932, 40). As the cemetery has only been published in preliminary reports, little more is known of the graves, the contents or the skeletal remains.

The final example is the cemetery located within the Sacred Animal Necropolis at Saqqara. It is dated by its original excavator to the late fourth and early fifth centuries (Martin 1974, 19); the subsequent excavators declined to give a date, due to lack of internal evidence, but note that occupation in the village to which the cemetery is attached 'cannot be dated more closely than sometime between the

⁸ See, for example, the cemetery outside the small church at Dime (Badawy 1978, 100, Figure 2.66). Monks buried outside monastery walls do not always conform to the east-west tradition (Prominska 1986; Bács 2000, 35).

⁹ Lythgoe (1908, 207) describes the superstructures as being either a mud-brick mastaba above a fill of rubble and gravel, and an oval mound of rubble and gravel with a mud-plaster coating. They resemble, therefore two of the superstructure types in Kellis 2 (Birrell 1999, 40).

beginning of the fifth and the middle of the sixth century' (Jeffreys and Strouhal 1980, 33). A total of 160 graves were excavated, this represents between 60 per cent and possibly as much as 80 per cent of the entire cemetery (Jeffreys and Strouhal 1980, 28). The graves are simple pits aligned on an east-west axis with deviations (see Footnote 2) (Jeffreys and Strouhal 1980, 34). Some had mud-brick superstructures and inscribed grave stelae, whilst certain of those without a superstructure were covered with large potsherds, a practice reminiscent of that in the Kellis 2 cemetery; the excavator reports that the potsherds included pieces of large red-ware storage vessels with roughly-inscribed Coptic texts (Martin 1974, 20). The bodies were wrapped in coarse linen shrouds, bound in either a criss-cross or lateral manner, and placed in the grave with the head to the west and feet to the east and the arms to the sides (Martin 1974, 21). The bodies were devoid of grave goods with a single exception (Martin 1974, 21).¹⁰ Unlike the burials in Kellis 2 cemetery, the majority of the bodies at Saqqara were laid on and bound to planks of wood that had been reused from coffins of the Saite and Ptolemaic periods, others were placed in reed or basketry carriers (Martin 1974, 21). Martin (1974, 21) notes in particular that one of the reused planks depicts the goddess Nut, together with a hieroglyphic inscription. The use of pagan funerary iconography was clearly not an anathema within this community.

This brief survey has shown that the Christian residents of Kellis adopted similar burial practices to those of their co-religionists in other parts of Egypt.¹¹ An overview of pagan burial practices in the Roman Period is useful for comparative purposes and to test the likelihood of pagans being amongst those interred in Kellis 2. The survey is restricted to sites within the oases because of the abundance of material throughout Egypt.

Pagan Burial Practices in the Oases during the Roman Period

Generalizations

Although there was a diversity of burial practices in the Roman Period, pagans conformed to the millennia-old tradition of equipping the deceased for the next life. The following are characteristic of such practices: mummification of the body; multiple interments in rock-cut chamber tombs or mausolea where bodies could be buried in pits, placed in coffins or on a bier, laid directly onto the floor with or without decorated cartonnage coverings. The deceased was accompanied by an array of grave goods.

Pagan Burial Practices at Bahariya Oasis

The bodies from the tombs at Bahariya Oasis, currently being excavated by Zahi Hawass (2000), are typical of Roman-Period examples found in the Nile Valley. Those interred represent an affluent section of the community. Their bodies were mummified and were fitted with gilded anthropomorphic head coverings, cartonnage, some depicting scenes from the traditional funerary repertoire, and footstalls; they were equipped with standard grave goods amongst which were jewellery, amulets, figurines of deities, glass and ceramic vessels (Hawass 2000, 42, 46–7, 71–3). The subterranean tombs are rock-cut multi-chambered structures, large enough to accommodate a substantial number of burials. The spaces within had been maximized with bodies placed shoulder-to-shoulder on ledges prepared for that purpose; Tomb 54 was 'so full that mummies had also been placed upon the floor' (Hawass 2000, 34). Some of the interments can be dated by the presence of coins, found mostly in the hands (Hawass 2000, 78). Hawass (2000, 78) notes that the coins range in date from Kleopatra VII (51–30 BCE) to Constantine I; all of those illustrated in his publication were struck prior to 318 CE (Hawass 2000, 78).

Pagan Burial Practices at Dush, Kharga Oasis

Seventy-two tombs have been excavated and recorded at the necropolis at Dush; the tentative date range is from the first century BCE to the fourth century CE (Dunand *et al.* 1992, 263–4). The tombs vary in size but all are multi-chambered, subterranean structures that contain multiple burials; they differ in plan and design to those at Bahariya. The bodies display a similar range of mummification techniques to those employed in the Kellis 1 cemetery, including the use of palm-frond rib frames to support the body (Dunand *et al.* 1992, 199–206, Plate 61; Aufderheide this volume). Some of the bodies were covered with cartonnage, including masks and footstalls decorated with traditional funerary iconography (Dunand *et al.* 1992, Plates 54–7). The variation in the quality of treatment of the bodies and their coverings reflects the economic status of the interred (Dunand *et al.* 1992, 99). Some tombs were clearly for the less affluent amongst the community but even these contained some grave goods (Dunand *et al.* 1992, 99, 158–9). The funerary assemblage was representative of the standard pharaonic repertoire: biers, *ba* birds, statues of deities, items of personal adornment, clothing, lamps, baskets, ceramic and glass vessels, fruit, grain myrtle and garlands of flowers (Dunand *et al.* 1992, 237–45 and Plates 58–93). The tombs were used over a considerable period of time; bodies were placed on the

¹⁰ The exception is the body of a female; she was buried clothed and wearing jewellery (Martin 1974, 21).

¹¹ The practice was not restricted to Egypt. A Christian cemetery with around 4,500 simple pit graves, cut on an east-west axis with bodies placed with heads to the west, has been discovered at Poundbury, Dorset, England (Davis 1999, 195 citing Painter 1989, 2049).

floor in no particular alignment and in some instances, bones were simply moved to one side when space was at a premium (Dunand *et al.* 1992, 159). Although a Christian community is attested at Dush (Deissmann 1902; Wagner 1987, 355–6), no pit-burial cemeteries have been found.¹²

Pagan Burial Practices at Kellis

Pit-grave cemeteries have been identified throughout Dakhleh Oasis; these are cut either into spring mounds or into the desert floor. The graves have a single interment, some within coffins, some without; they are distinguished from Christian burials in that there is no conformity of alignment (Mills 1979; 1980; 1981; 1982; 1983).

The pagan community at Kellis was buried either in single-chamber rock-cut tombs in a cemetery to the north-west of the village, designated Kellis 1 (31/420-C5-1), or in the numerous mud-brick mausolea that are located on the outskirts of the village to the north and south: the North Tomb Group and the South Tomb Group (Knudstad and Frey 1999, 208–13; Hope this volume). The chamber tombs of Kellis 1 each contain multiple burials with the bodies placed directly onto the floor but in no particular alignment (Birrell 1999, 29–38). No coffins have been found. Seven patterns of body treatment have been identified ranging from full mummification, which entailed the removal of the viscera, to natural desiccation of the body without human interference (Aufderheide *et al.* this volume); some had palm ribs inserted alongside the spinal column or were strapped to palm-rib frames (Birrell 1999, 35).¹³ A few of the bodies had head and/or full cartonnage coverings and footstalls adorned with traditional funerary iconography (Schweitzer 2002, 269–76); grave goods are similarly representative of the standard Egyptian funerary assemblage, such as *ba* birds and offering tables (Birrell 1999, 38). The quality of the mummification and the coverings, together with the provision of funerary goods, is no doubt wealth related. It is of particular interest to note that both elaborate and simple burials were placed within the same tomb and that bodies were piled one on top of the other; earlier burials were simply pushed to one side to make room for later interments (Birrell 1999, 33–5).¹⁴ Study of the cartonnage indicates that the same tombs were used over a considerable period of time with interments throughout the cemetery as a whole ranging in date from the late Ptolemaic Period to the third century CE (Schweitzer 2002, 269–76); ceramics confirm the date (Patten 1999, 88). There is, therefore, some overlap in the dates of the interments in Kellis 1 and Kellis 2.

Two of the North and one of the South Tombs have been excavated (Hope this volume). These are large, mud-brick mausolea that were erected for the affluent amongst the pagan community of Kellis. North Tomb 1 is decorated in a combination of pharaonic and classical design (Hope this volume; Kaper this volume). The only bodies found *in situ* in this tomb were those of Christians (below), although a surplus of bones for the number of graves (Dupras and Tocheri this volume) and the discovery of traditional grave goods amongst the rubble may well have belonged to the original burials (Hope this volume).

Tomb 2 was badly looted and the skeletal material is commingled. The commingled remains indicate a minimum number of 14 adults and six juveniles, plus two wrapped bodies: a female and an infant (Dupras and Tocheri this volume). The skeletal remains in Room 2 were disturbed but the bodies appear to have been placed directly onto the floor in an east-west direction with the heads on the east (Hope this volume). Decorated wooden fragments from what might have been a funerary bed, together with pieces of cartonnage, were found in Room 3 and elements from a funerary bed were retrieved from the fill of Room 4. Three intrusive pit graves had been cut against the northern, southern and western walls of the transverse hall, Room 4; the bodies had been placed in ceramic coffins. The mummified body of a young woman was found *in situ* within its coffin; it was elaborately wrapped and accompanied by a mummy label. A mummified head and torso of a male, found in the same vicinity, may once have occupied one of the other damaged ceramic coffins (Hope this volume). The burials have been dated tentatively prior to the early third century (Hope this volume). The modes of interment within the tomb reflect the variety of possibilities within the pagan tradition. The inclusion of six children is of interest; these far outnumber the ratio of adults/child burials found in Kellis 1 but reflect that of West Tomb 1 (below). The youngest individual represented by the skeletal remains was aged around 3 years at death; the others range from 8.75 to 15.5 years (Dupras and Tocheri this volume, 191, Table 9).

South Tomb 4 had been looted but the remains of six adults and two juveniles were identified (Dupras and Tocheri this volume). Items from the traditional funerary repertoire were found amongst the debris; no grave pits were found (Hope this volume).

The investigation so far indicates that whilst early Christians had no compunction about burial alongside pagans, the reverse was not so. Pagans in Bahariya and

¹² Dunand and Lichtenberg (1998, 161–3) identify the occupants of a single tomb located about 800 metres from the main necropolis as Christian. The identification rests upon the method of mummification and wrapping that parallel those used for the bodies of the monks from St Mark's Monastery, Thebes, but is not otherwise attested at Dush. No indication of the orientation of the burials is given. Coins found in the tomb date to 375–8 (Dunand and Lichtenberg 1998, 163).

¹³ The use of resin (old carbon) in the mummification process contaminates samples and consequently no radiocarbon dates derived from these bodies can be relied upon.

¹⁴ Birrell (1999, 33) notes that the average tomb size is 370 x 220 cm; they contained as many as 42 bodies.

Dush continued the traditional burial practices into the fourth century and therefore it is unlikely that those at Kellis would have chosen a simple pit grave within a Christian cemetery when interment within a rock-cut tomb or mausoleum was available. On this evidence it can probably be agreed that Kellis 2 was for the exclusive use of Christians and therefore a first–second century CE date for its foundation is untenable.

The Suggested Period of Use of the Kellis 2 Cemetery

If one accepts that the human remains from Kellis 2 analysed by Molto's team belonged to Christians, the radiocarbon results (Stewart *et al.* this volume) indicate that the people of Kellis had not only converted to Christianity, but in sufficient numbers to argue for and to warrant the foundation of a separate cemetery by the beginning of the third century at the latest. This argument, however, is not sustainable on current evidence from the site, nor in light of the absence of contemporary data from Egypt as a whole. As stated earlier, Christians identifying as such are invisible in the archaeological record until the mid-third century. This is due to several factors amongst which are the probable slow rate of conversion, the fear of persecution, and the lack of need or desire in some instances for an independent identity. Change in burial practices in the *chora* can only be expected with the adoption of doctrinal developments promoted by the authorities in Alexandria during the Little Peace of the Church from the third quarter of the third century (Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* vii. 13).

The Earliest Evidence of Christians at Kellis: An Onomastic Approach

The earliest documented evidence for a Christian presence at Kellis is 319 (*PUG* 20 and *P. Med.* inv. 68.82), although it is likely that the religion had been introduced to the village much earlier. A method is required, therefore, that allows us to trace the introduction of the religion back in time. One possible avenue, although tenuous, is to adopt an onomastic approach based upon that of Roger S. Bagnall (1982) who suggested that the study of onomastic evidence could be useful in determining the pace of conversion to Christianity in Egypt. The basic premise for this model is that Christians are apt to give their offspring Christian names and therefore if one has a body of such names, together with Christian patronyms, in dated papyri it can be assumed that the child with the Christian name was given such by his or her parent a generation earlier. The first task is to determine which names are likely to be Christian. Bagnall (1982, 110–11) identified the following: biblical names, names compounded with the Coptic *noute*, names based upon abstract nouns and adjectives of theological content, and names of saints and martyrs. The second requirement is to determine the average years for a

generation. Bagnall and Frier (1994, 118–46) in their demographic study of Roman Egypt based upon census data suggest a generation gap of between 33–35 years. With these criteria in mind, one can cautiously adopt the model and consider the relevant data from Kellis.

The vast majority of dated documents from Ismant el-Kharab that attest Christians in the village derive from House 3, with some from House 2, in Area A. These contiguous houses were occupied from the end of the third century (Hope 2001, 54–5). It must be acknowledged that the sample is too small to function as anything other than an indicator of a possible Christian presence. Furthermore, as no ages are given for the men documented in the papyri, an element of conjecture is required. As it is not known at what age a man could be a party to a contract or to subscribe to a document, I have applied an arbitrary age of 25 years for men listed in official documents and have taken the upper figure of 35 years for a generation; the figure for both could well be higher as it cannot be determined whether or not the son was the eldest child. The most popular Christian name attested in the papyri from Kellis is Timotheos followed by variants upon Papnouthios (Worp 1995). The use of these names by Christians in the village is verified in personal letters. What is also notable from the Kellis papyri is that many Christian parents gave their offspring pagan names. Tithoes, the name of the principal god of Kellis, is the most common name to be found and was used by pagan and Christian alike (Worp 1995). Because of this practice, it is assumed that the son of a man with a Christian name is himself Christian. The rapid spread of Christianity in the village as shown by the demise of temple worship, the erection in the first part of the fourth century of a basilica church, and the lack of fourth-century burials in the Kellis 1 cemetery, lends credence to this assumption.

The study commences with firmly dated documents containing Christian patronyms. The first, P.Kell. I Gr. 24, dated 352 (Worp 1995, 72–6), lists at least 33 male residents of Kellis who have subscribed; four have Christian names, two have both Christian names and patronyms: Aurelius Timotheos, son of Timotheos (1.16) and Psenouphis, son of Psenouphis, alias Besas (1.17). Assuming Timotheos and Psenouphis were both 25 years old when the document was drawn up and their fathers aged 35 years at the time of their birth, the fathers were likely to have been born into a Christian family *circa* 292 at the latest. The second document, P.Kell. I Gr. 23, dated 353 (Worp 1995, 68–72), is a petition to the *praeses* of the Thebaid. The person implicated is Timotheos, described as 'the boy' (line 15); others include Psekes, son of Psenouphis (line 18), Psenouthes, Theotimes and Pachoumis (line 18). Using the same formula, Psenouphis' birth date was *circa* 293. The third text, P.Kell. I Gr. 8, dated 362 (Worp 1995, 29–31), records the sale of a slave. Whilst none of those involved in the sale are identified overtly as Christian, the purchaser, Aurelius Tithoes, son of Petesis, is known from other

documents to have followed the faith.¹⁵ The witness to the sale, Aurelius Horion, son of Timotheos (line 19) is of relevance to this study. Horion's father, Timotheos, was presumably born to Christian parents around 302.

The following are documents that the editor has dated by association, palaeography, formulaic evidence, commodity prices, or a combination of the above. The first, P.Kell. I Gr. 60, is a wooden board with a list of names, which Worp (1995, 161–2) dates to the late third to early fourth centuries. Worp (1995, 161–2) states:

... most names are pagan Egyptian, Greek and Latin names and they seem to point to an earlier period; only the fathers' names Timotheos and Elias (ll. 8, 11), may be related to the spreading of Christianity ... Given the fact that none of the persons mentioned seem to occur elsewhere in the Greek papyri from Kellis one may be tempted to think that perhaps the board belongs to another, slightly earlier period. ... there is no palaeographical obstacle against dating the text to ca. 300–310 rather than ca. 290–300.

The names of interest in this text are Psais, son of Timotheos, and Tithoes, son of Elias. Taking the document midway between the suggested date given by Worp, 300, Timotheos and Elias would have been born to Christian parents *circa* 275. P.Kell. I Gr. 61 is dated *circa* 360, or slightly later, by commodity prices (Worp 1995, 162–4). Names in this document include: Jacob the potter (line 1), Rachel (l. 5), Thermouthis, daughter (?) of Papnouthis (line 6), Mar(i)a or Marsha or Mar(s)a, daughter of Apollon (line 11), Isidora, daughter of John (line 12), Isid (), son of Papnouthis (line 13). If a date of 360 is taken for the document, one could expect both Papnouthis and John to have been born to Christian parents *circa* 300. P.Kell. I Gr. 74 is dated mid-fourth century (Worp 1995, 193–5) without further qualification. This private letter is from Psais the potter (lines 1–2) to his father Aron who is addressed variously as 'my father Aron' (line 1), 'brother Aron' (line 32) and 'my lord father brother in Kellis' (lines 34–5); one assumes a spiritual brotherhood. The text is further complicated by reference to two mothers Agape/Tagape, one of who appears to be with Psais (lines 4–6) and one with Aron (lines 6–7). Should the date and parentage be correct, Aron and Agape/Tagape must have been born in the closing years of the third century. Returning to *PUG* 20 and *P. Med. inv.* 68.8, and applying the same criteria, Timotheos would have been born to a Christian father some time before 295.

If the onomastic hypothesis is valid within this context, and assuming Worp's palaeographic dating to be correct, the birth dates cluster between 292 and 305, with the earliest being *circa* 275. Keeping in mind that most of these dates represent the birth of children to fathers who were given those names by Christian fathers, the grandfathers must themselves have been born at least 35

years earlier. Whether or not these grandfathers were born to Christian fathers or whether they were converts to the religion cannot be determined. An argument against the model is that the men changed their names upon conversion; the naming pattern at Kellis, however, indicates that this was unlikely. Pagan names continued to be used within Christian families until the end of occupation at Kellis, as attested by the latest documents from House 3: P.Kell. I Gr. 44 and 45 (Worp 1995, 130–6). A further difficulty faced by such an approach is that it does not take into account the possibility of immigration to Kellis by these men. With all of these variables taken into consideration, one can suggest, albeit tentatively, a Christian presence in the village from the 250s. It can be stated with confidence that by the first half of the fourth century, the Christian community was large enough to warrant and to fund the building and pay for the upkeep of a sizeable basilica alongside a smaller church that was operational from the early years of the fourth century (Bowen 2002, 65–85; this volume).

Evidence of squatter activity in the Temple of Tutu indicates that it was no longer functioning in a formal capacity by the mid-fourth century. From the names recorded on the numerous ostraka found in the temple precinct, especially Shrine III, many of those using the facility following its abandonment were Christian (Worp, forthcoming). The last recorded priest of Tutu was Stonios who in 335 acted as *hypographeus* for Aurelius Pekysis, in a contract of division of property (P.Kell. I Gr. 13, line 14; Worp 1995, 38–42). It is of interest to note that one of the parties to the division bears a probable Christian name: Pachoumis. The document cannot be used as evidence that the temple was still functioning in a formal capacity. Stonios is first attested as a priest in documents found in the Temple of Tutu that are dated 298–300, 299 and 311 (Worp 2002, 333–9). By 335 he was likely to have been around 60 years of age. Whilst age would not preclude him from performing his duties as a priest, it is equally possible that he retained the title after the temple cult had ceased to function. Although there is no way of confirming such a hypothesis, fourth-century papyri from the Nile Valley show that priests may be listed as private individuals who retain their titles as a means of identification rather than in relation to their religious duties (Bagnall 1992, 291). It is also of interest to note that in 337, a priest of the catholic church, Aurelius Harpokrates, was witness to a contract in the village (P.Kell. I Gr. 58, l. 8; Worp 1995, 158–9). It should be noted that in the early years of the fourth century the priests anticipated that the cult of Tutu would continue. This is attested by a document regarding circumcised priests that was sent to a government official in the Mothite Nome; it includes infants, not yet circumcised, but who were required to be before holding priestly office (Worp 2002, 346 number 10).

¹⁵ The documents that establish Aurelius Tithoes as a Christian are P.Kell. I Gr. 10, 11, 12, 19 and P.Kell. V Copt. 12.

Archaeological Evidence for the Abandonment of Kellis

Returning to the radiocarbon data, the suggested latest interments in Kellis 2 cemetery are somewhere within the date-range 380–600, although Stewart *et al.* (this volume) acknowledge that the 600 date is unlikely. Archaeological evidence indicates that Kellis was abandoned towards the end of the fourth century. The latest dated documents from House 3 are 382 and 386 (P.Kell. I Gr. 44 and 45; Worp 1995 130–6); the latest dated document from Kellis is 392 (Worp, cited in Hope and Bowen 1997, 61; Hope 2002, 204). Amongst the 600 plus coins found at the site, only two examples of the massive *SALVS REPVBLICAE* issue that was struck between 388–95 have been identified (Bowen 1998, 236–7). Evidence from hoards deposited in Egypt indicate that this issue accounts for the greatest percentage of coins in circulation in the early fifth century: 55% of the De May Hoard, containing 289 coins, closed shortly after 402; 41% of the Hawara Hoard (H6) containing 2,248 identifiable coins, closed sometime after 410; 32% of the Kom Aushim Hoard A, comprising 582 identifiable coins, closed *circa* 410; 34% of the Kom Aushim Hoard B, comprising 604 identifiable coins, closed *circa* 423 and 32% of the Hawara Hoard B, containing 1,929 identifiable coins, closed *circa* 426; (Bowen 1998, 216–27). The issue is well represented at Dush in Kharga Oasis¹⁶ and so it cannot be argued that there was a time-lag in the currency circulating in the Western Desert. Both the Large East Church and the West Church appear to have been abandoned in the late fourth century (Bowen 2002, 81–3). The latest coin from the large church is an issue struck by Theodosius between 378–383; the majority of coins from the church date between 348–378 (Bowen 2002, 81). The latest coin from the West Church is one of the two *SALVS REPVBLICAE* issues with the remainder dating from the mid-fourth century (Bowen 2002, 83). In the 15 years of excavation at the site, no diagnostic ceramics of the fifth-century have been found amongst the ubiquitous sherds and vessels at the site (C. A. Hope personal communication, 2002); one would expect such from the houses and from the churches if the latter were operative in the fifth century. It is likely that the residents were forced to abandon the village because of the effects of salinity and the activity of sand dunes that threatened to cover the village (Hope 2001, 56–7). The residents of House 3 had responded to this threat by raising the front door and building a retaining wall around it in order to curtail the sand's encroachment (Hope 2001, 57).

Possible Post-Abandonment Use of the Kellis 2 Cemetery

It could be argued that insufficient excavation has been undertaken at Ismant el-Kharab to confirm that Kellis was

abandoned in its entirety at the end of the fourth century.¹⁷ Surface surveys and test excavations have provided no evidence to indicate that there was any habitation, other than squatter activity in Area B during the fourth century and Area C seems to have been abandoned by the end of the third century. It appears that by the fourth-century the residential area had moved into Area A (Hope 2001, 57). There is evidence for post-abandonment activity in various areas of the site, for instance, the Coptic graffiti in the apse of the Small East Church and some late activity within the North Pastophorium in the Large East Church (Bowen 2002, 75; this volume), and Coptic graffiti on the walls of the *mamissi*, some of which was written by the goose-herders George and Kyris who were using the shrine, presumably as a shelter (Kaper this volume). It should be kept in mind, however, that any occupation must have been minimal for one would expect the churches to remain open to serve the congregation.

Other Christian Burials at Kellis*The Christian Cemetery in Enclosure 4*

The remainder of the paper focuses upon Christian burials in other parts of Kellis: cemetery D/6 and D/7 in Enclosure 4 and the interments in North Tomb 1. A small Christian cemetery (D/7) lies within the walls of Enclosure 4, on the extreme north-west of the village (Hope 2000, 58; this volume, Figure 11). The cemetery is associated with two classical-style monumental tombs (below), possibly of first-century CE date (Hope in Bowen *et al.* 1993, 21–3; Hope and McKenzie 1999, 54–68; Hope 2000, 57–8) and a two-roomed church, with a sizeable annex, to its west (Hope 1993, 23–5; Bowen 2002, 75–81). All are pit graves, oriented east-west with the bodies placed with their heads to the west. No grave goods were found with the burials, none of which had been disturbed. Graves 1 and 2 were built against the exterior east wall of the church, behind the north apse side chamber; these graves each had a mud-brick superstructure (Hope 1995, 57–8) and contained the skeletonized remains of two females (Bodies 1 and 2, Molto *et al.* this volume). Their location indicates that they post-date the erection of the church (Hope 1995, 58; this volume). The seven remaining graves are to the west of the classical-style tombs: three beside West Tomb 1 (Graves 3–5) and the remaining four grouped in the south-eastern corner of the enclosure (Graves 6–9). The graves had no surviving superstructure but were sealed with mud bricks; Grave 9 had a small bowl set into the ground at the head end and the impression for another was found in Grave 7 (Hope this volume). The bowl contained pieces of charcoal and a second, smaller bowl had been placed

¹⁶ I am indebted to Michel Amandry, Directeur du département des Monnaies, Médailles et Antiquités, Bibliothèque nationale de France, for providing me with copies of his inventories for the coinage of Dush and giving me permission to use his material for comparative purposes.

¹⁷ The domestic structures in Area D (D/8) show activity in the fourth century but not the fifth (Hope 2002, 202–4).

inside the first; the latter retained the burnt remains of some substance that may have been part of the Eucharist offered at the grave side. The graves contained the remains of three females (bodies 3, 5 and 7), two males (bodies 8 and 9), one infant aged about 18 months (body 6) and a foetus or perinate (body 4) (Molto *et al.* this volume). The sex representation in the cemetery is of interest: five females, two males and two infants of undetermined sex. The two males were buried next to one another in the extreme-south eastern corner of the enclosure; the ceramic vessels were associated with one of the male burials (body 9), the missing bowl with a female burial (body 7). The foetus/perinate was buried beside a woman aged 60 ± 5 years (Molto *et al.* this volume).

Two east-west burials were found beneath the floor in the nave of the West Church, D/6 (Graves 10 and 11) (Hope 2000, 58; this volume, Figure 11): a male (body 1) and an infant aged about six months (body 2) (Molto *et al.* this volume). Their location in front of the apse, with the male to the north and the infant on the south side of the *bema*, suggest that the burials post-date the building of the church. No other burials were found in the floor of the nave although further excavation in the room to its west where laid mud bricks have been exposed beneath the floor, could reveal more.

West Tomb 1

The location of the cemetery within Enclosure 4 and the burials in the West Church require discussion. The focus of Graves 3–5 was West Tomb 1; they were located in the most prominent position, that is, to either side of the sandstone steps that formed the approach to the tomb (Hope 2000, 57–9; this volume). The tomb itself, which was excavated in 1992–1993, contained 12 bodies, probably secondary interments: five adults and seven juveniles, the latter aged between 5–8 years at death (Hope and McKenzie 1999, 55–6). The bodies were shrouded and some attempt at mummification had been carried out (Hope and McKenzie 1999, 56–60). The treatment of the bodies differed to that found within the Kellis 1 cemetery and in North Tomb 2, in that the chests and abdomens of several of the bodies were filled with dark brown, hardened sand (Hope and McKenzie 1999, 56); the remains were skeletal. Two of the bodies had finger rings but no other items of personal adornment. The funerary assemblage included pots, a basket, glass vessels, a spatula, a pair of small lead sandals, a small funerary bed and 39 funerary bouquets of rosemary and myrtle (Hope and McKenzie 1999, 56–61; Thanheiser 1999, 89); the bouquets are similar to those found in the graves in Kellis 2. Notable was the lack of traditional funerary items such as *ba* birds, altars or iconography that characterize the burials in the rock-cut tombs and the North Tombs. Although the bodies had

been disturbed, they were oriented roughly east-west with the heads placed both to the east and the west; two lay on top of two sandstone blocks that had been placed upon the floor (Hope and McKenzie 1999, 55–6). The burials in West Tomb 1 have been dated tentatively to the late third to early fourth century (Hope and McKenzie 1999, 61). It cannot be determined whether the bodies were those of pagans or Christians; the absence of any remnants of traditional funerary items argues against the former whilst the orientation of the heads, if that was the original position, might, though not necessarily, preclude the latter. Birrell (1999, 33–4) notes that the latest interments in Group 2 tombs in Kellis 1 were skeletal remains, simply wrapped, often placed on sandstone blocks or large potsherds and almost invariably laid on the floor with the head on the west. The similarity of burial practice could indicate that the two are contemporary and may reflect early, or an alternative form of Christian burial, although, there is no way of proving this. The development of the D/7 cemetery against the tomb wall and the proximity of the church might favour the identification of the interments as Christians, or at least regarded as such, by the community. If this was the case, the tomb could have functioned as a martyrium, for such held the bodies of martyrs or saintly Christians. This could explain the erection and location of the church for cemetery churches were built within close proximity to the martyria (Grossmann 1989, 434; 1991, 208).

The West Church

The West Church probably functioned as a cemetery church. It was in such buildings that the relatives congregated to offer prayers for the dead both at the time of the funeral and on anniversaries. Church burials are well attested; wealthy patrons could afford such a privilege (Grossmann 1991, 208). The West Church sanctuary differs to those of the other two churches at Kellis in that it has a two-stepped platform built directly in front of the apse and the benches are built against all four walls with a break only for the doorway, the platform of the apse, and the area in front of the pilasters that flank the apse (Bowen 2002, 75–8). The apse side chambers parallel those of the Small East Church in that the north chamber is fitted with storage bins whilst the south chamber is empty; neither communicates directly with the apse (Bowen this volume, Figures 1, 4 and 5, Plates 5, 8 and 9). There is no evidence for cupboards in the nave, which are characteristic of the East Churches,¹⁸ and no remains of gypsum wall plaster were found. The nave communicates with the west room and the doorway between the two was narrowed on either side by two metres (Bowen 2002, Figure 8, Plate 8). The west room has benches along three of its walls but none in the south-eastern corner. Three ceramic vessels were found on one of the benches next to the door that opens into

¹⁸ The north wall is too eroded to determine whether or not it was fitted with cupboards; the other walls are preserved sufficiently to indicate the lack of such.

Room 8. Preservation is too poor to determine whether there were any cupboards. As neither of the outer rooms of the East Churches has been excavated, no comparisons can be drawn.

The West Church is similar to some of the so-called apse tombs at Oxyrhynchus (Petrie 1925, 16–17, Plates XLI and XLV). In Tombs 23 and 42 at Oxyrhynchus, the bodies were placed in shallow pit graves beneath the floor directly in front of the sanctuary (Petrie 1925, 16). Neither tomb is published in any detail but from the plan Tomb 23 appears to have two randomly placed graves. The plan of the much larger Tomb 42 does not indicate the location of the pit graves; Petrie (1925, 16), however, states that they were in front of the sanctuary. Grossmann (2002, 337) suggests that Tomb 42 functioned as an independent church.

The West Church at Kellis has a contiguous seven-roomed structure to its south, through which the church is accessed; its function has not been explained adequately but it can now be assumed to have been associated with burials and/or funerary rituals (Bowen 2002, 78). The south-western room, Room 1, gives access to the complex as a whole. This is equipped with benches and impressions found on the floor indicate that many large jars had been used in the room; the room was also furnished with a hearth, presumably for the preparation of food. A flight of stairs leading to an upper storey above the church itself was built against the west wall, directly opposite the entrance door; the corridor that leads to the west room of the church runs parallel to the staircase opening from the easternmost end of the north wall of Room 1. Room 3, opening off Room 1, was probably an open courtyard. It has storage bins and a covered shelter; several pots were found in the room. There were a number of imprints of donkey hooves on the floor and chicken feathers and eggshells attest the presence of these animals. The suite of four rooms opening off Room 3 has no features other than a wall niche; the architecture and artefacts found within give no indication of their function. The majority of coins derived from just inside the entrance to Rooms 6 and 7. Several mud sealing were also retrieved from the complex. The numerous ostraka, found in Room 3 and in Room 8, a small room adjacent to the staircase but opening into the west room of the church, are mostly receipts for commodities such as chickens, eggs, oil, pigs, wheat, wine, donkeys, probably for purpose of transportation, and payment of amounts in talents and various commodities (Worp forthcoming).

Enclosure 4

The building of the church and a substantial enclosure wall, preserved to at least three metres in height in the north-eastern corner, and the incorporation of the West Tombs within that enclosure, was not a random development but a conscious act by the Christian

community of Kellis to define and isolate a sacred space. The complex is itself isolated from Enclosure 3 to its south and Enclosure 2 to its east. The only means of access is from the west, somewhere to the south of the church annex. The enclosure, therefore, remained separate from the village. The incorporation of the West Tomb identifies the structure as a Christian monument at that period of its use and as integral to the nature and function of the enclosed space. Sufficient land was made available for burials and it would appear that those buried in the south-western corner and those abutting the church wall were interred after the building of the enclosure wall (Hope this volume, Figure 11). The small two-roomed structure erected close to the north wall of the enclosure is associated with the cemetery and was presumably erected along with the church. As there was no evidence for the presence of graves, it is unlikely to have been a family tomb. The paucity of burials in the D/7 cemetery is perplexing. It could be suggested that the cemetery was reserved for a specific sect; a Manichaean community was resident at Kellis (Gardner 1996; Gardner *et al.* 1999). This, however, is purely speculative and has no corroborative evidence. An alternative suggestion is that it was the domain of a particular family, perhaps descendants of those buried in West Tomb 1. The rare genetic trait identified by Molto (this volume) and his team in bodies 3, 5 and 10: the male buried in the church and the two females buried next to the tomb, and the evidence of spina bifida in all three males, could be offered as supporting evidence.

In Dakhleh, the practice of burials around a church was not restricted to Kellis. In 1980, Colin Hope excavated four pit graves dug along the north wall of the church of Deir Abu Metta (32/405-A7-1) in the west of the oasis; the bodies were in the traditional Christian east-west burial position, heads on the west, shrouded and without burial goods. Two coins found in the vicinity, although not necessarily associated with the burials, were issues of Constantine I.¹⁹ As the purpose of the excavation was a trial test and the area exposed only 7.9 m north-south by 5.6 m east-west, the extent of the cemetery is not known, nor was it possible to determine whether there were burials within the church itself. Only one other church has been identified in Dakhleh: Deir el-Molouk (31/405-M6-1); the plan has been determined but only a small area in the south half of the sanctuary was tested (Mills 1981, 185, Plate XI).

Christian Burials in North Tomb 1

North Tomb 1 is the largest of the mud-brick mausolea at Kellis; it is located to the north of Area A and the west of Area B (Hope this volume, Figures 1 and 12). It was built for members of the pagan community (above), but the latest interments are those of Christians. There are 24 pit graves cut on an east-west axis; the heads of those bodies that

¹⁹ I am indebted to Colin Hope for providing me with a copy of his field notes from which the information is taken.

remained *in situ* were placed to the west. There were no funerary goods, although Grave 3, an undisturbed burial in Room 2, yielded a fragment of gypsum sealing that preserved the impression of the Christian *crux ansata* (Hope this volume). The bodies were confined to the western Rooms 2, 3 and 4, the outer corridors 6 and 14 and a small room to the east of the north entrance to the tomb, Room 8 (Hope this volume, Figures 12 and 16). Those bodies buried within Rooms 2–4 were badly disturbed and it was uncertain in some instances which of the skeletal remains belonged to individual graves (Dupras and Tocheri this volume, 185). It would appear, however, that those interred in graves in Room 2 were mostly juveniles, those in Room 3 all adult, whilst Room 4 contained the remains of three adults and a perinate. The burials in Room 6 were of a juvenile and an infant, that in Room 8 was an infant and the six graves in Room 14, which are located beneath the outer west wall of Rooms 2 and 3, contained the remains of seven individuals, the oldest being an infant aged about eight to nine months, three were newborn and the remainder were foetuses in various stages of development (Dupras and Tocheri this volume). It is possible that North Tomb 1 was a family mausoleum and that the later interments were descendants of the original owner who continued to use it following conversion to Christianity. Such practice is attested in Roman tombs in Italy where no member could be denied burial in a private family tomb on the basis of belief unless the head of the family so decreed (Johnson 1999, 40–1). Molto (this volume) and his team have identified an unusual disease in two skeletons found in Room 3 that could well indicate a family group; no mention is made of whether or not this is genetic, however, and as remains of earlier burials are probably co-mingled with later ones the hypothesis cannot be tested.

A tomb at Amheida in the west of the oasis is probably a further example of Christian burials within a pagan mausoleum. This multi-chambered monumental tomb is built of sandstone and mud brick (Mills 1980, 269–71). In a test excavation carried out during the 1979 field season three east-west orientated pits were found beneath a stone-lined floor of the western half of the central chamber (Mills 1980, 270, Plate XIV). Mills (1980, 270) identifies them as probably Christian but as there is no indication that the graves were excavated a positive identification cannot be made.

Burials in North Tomb 2 and South Tomb 4

There is no evidence for Christian reuse of North Tomb 2 or South Tomb 4. The intrusive child burial in Room 2 of North Tomb 2 is anomalous. Although the interment of infants is typical of Christian tradition, the north-south

alignment of the grave renders such an identification inconclusive.²⁰ The absence of Christian graves within these mausolea might suggest that the usurpation of monumental tombs was not common practice.

Foetal Burials

The burial of foetuses is of considerable interest for our understanding of early Christian concepts of the nature and status of unborn children, and of the entrance of the soul into the body. As such they warrant further study. The foetuses were individually wrapped with the same attention was paid to the orientation within the grave, implying, therefore, the expectation of resurrection. Foetuses have also been found amongst the burials in Kellis 2 cemetery (Marlow 1999, 107; Tocheri *et al.* in press) indicating that it was common practice amongst Christians. Marlow (1999, 107–8, Figure 10.Ib) identified six foetal remains amongst her sample group of 56, with a further nine falling within the range of 38–43 weeks after conception; one of the foetuses (Burial 28) was of about 18 weeks gestation. Of particular note is the discovery of a foetus of approximately 14 weeks gestation amongst the debris of an upper room in House 4 in Area A; it is the youngest example of such from Kellis (Dupras *et al.* forthcoming). The body had been carefully wrapped in linen in the same manner as those of a later stage of development. Whilst the context in which it was found does not identify it as originating in House 4, it is not unreasonable to suggest that the foetus was conceived and prepared for burial by Christians, for both Manichaean and what might be loosely termed ‘catholic’ documents have been retrieved from the house. How the body came to be in the debris is not known, nor can it be certain whether or not it was intended for interment in the cemetery.

No foetal burials are attested in Kellis 1 cemetery (Marlow 1999, 106; T. Dupras personal communication, 2001); in fact, few infant or children’s bodies have been retrieved from that necropolis (Marlow 1999, 108),²¹ a phenomenon that is also noted at Dush (Dunand *et al.* 1992, 216–8). It would appear, therefore, that it was not customary for the pagan community to bury foetuses or infants in communal or family tombs. The body of a child aged around two years was found buried within the north wall of a room C/2/3 (Hope 1999, 62); this could suggest that such were placed within the home, a practice known from pharaonic times.

Conclusions

The number of Christian burials at Kellis and the lack of identified pagan burials from the end of the third century attest the rapid conversion of the community. There is no

²⁰ The skeletal remains of the child have not yet been analyzed and so an age at death cannot be determined.

²¹ By contrast, Marlow (1999, 107) in her provisional report of 1994, noted that of 137 bodies exhumed in the Kellis 2 cemetery, 30% were infants and of those 37% were neonates.

archaeological or documentary evidence, however, to suggest that Christians identifying as such had arrived before the mid-third century. This conforms to the paucity of evidence for Christianity for that period throughout Egypt and indeed the Empire. This presents difficulties in accepting the suite of early dates yielded by radiocarbon analyses.

Evidence for the abandonment of the village at the end of the fourth century is strong. Dated documents may well be the result of serendipity but Worp has found no palaeographic evidence amongst the numerous undated texts to assign them to the fifth century or later. No fifth-century issues are found amongst the coins that have been retrieved from excavated structures and from the surface of the site; those struck after 375 are at a premium. A thorough surface survey, and eighteen years of excavation at the site, has yielded none of the diagnostic fifth-century ceramic evidence that is present at other oasis sites such as Mut, Amheida, the small Christian settlement in the west to name a few. The earlier forms of North African Red Slip and the imitation oasis ware, that one expects within a mid-late fourth-century context, are present but these are concentrated in the region of fourth-century occupation, Area A, and have not been found elsewhere (C. A. Hope personal communication, 2003). The archaeological data is again at odds with the dates assigned at the upper end of the radiocarbon range. A feasible explanation for any use of Kellis 2 in the fifth century has been proposed by Hope (personal communication, 2002), that is, that having abandoned the village through necessity, the people returned in order to bury their dead.

Whilst it can be argued that the abandonment was protracted, it is not known where the population relocated or whether it was scattered. It is difficult, therefore, to maintain that the successive generations of families continued to bury their dead at Kellis for upwards of one hundred years after abandonment. Molto (personal communication 2002) has acknowledged the need to analyze significantly more samples than has been possible so far; these are anxiously awaited by all.

The decision made by the Kellis community to reject traditional burial practices and commence a new cemetery along what must have been the preferred Christian lines, indicates an awareness of such practices and willingness to conform to Church doctrine. Little social differentiation is obvious in death and there was no display of wealth. Grave goods, where found, are minimal and of little commercial value, yet the texts, the architecture and artefacts from the site do not suggest an impoverished Christian community. Even those burials within the church, the D/7 cemetery, North Tomb 1 and Enclosures 1 and 2 in Kellis 2, which might represent an affluent section of the community, are devoid of burial goods.

As implied by the title, this paper is very much a summary of work in progress. Much more study and analyses of Christian burial practices at Kellis remains to be undertaken. Further work is required to consider the likely continuing use of the family mausolea following the

conversion of the descendants to Christianity. For this study to progress it is necessary to excavate other mausolea in the North and South Tomb groups in the expectation that the remains of pagan, as well as later Christian interments, have survived and that DNA analysis can be applied. The implication of the foetal burials for Christian doctrine relating to unborn children is yet another area that demands attention and will be considered further in subsequent publications. For now, one can do no more than stress the importance of the site of Ismant el-Kharab for our understanding of the formative years of Christianity in Egypt.

Acknowledgements

The excavations in D/6, D/7 and North Tomb 1 were funded by Monash University, which also provided funding to assist with the publication of the Christian burials. I am greatly indebted to Colin A. Hope for his generosity in providing me with unpublished data from his personal research to incorporate into this paper, for his extensive comments on the latter and for his guidance in details of archaeological interpretation. I thank Anthony Mills for inviting me to publish the archaeology of the Kellis 2 cemetery (work in progress), Eldon Molto for discussing the pathology, radiocarbon dating and other details of the bodies from the Kellis 2 cemetery and Tosha Dupras for reading and commenting upon this paper and providing me with information on infant and foetal burials.

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